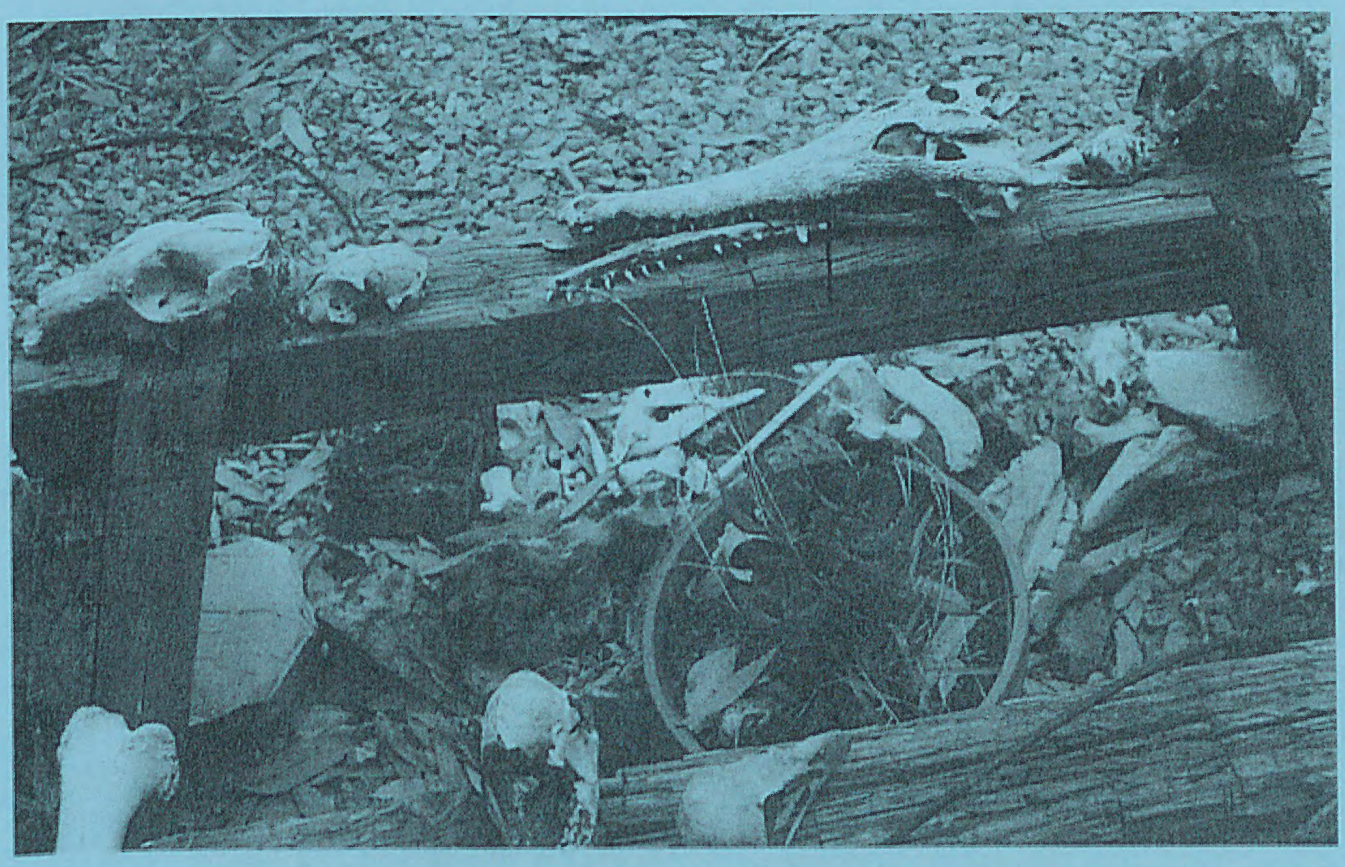
WHIRRAKEE

April 2013

Vol. 34 No. 3

Registered by Australia Post. Publication No. VBH4462



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
ISSN 0812-423X e-mail address: info@bendigofnc.com.au

Office Bearers for 2012 - 2013

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
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Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
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Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 34, No. 3, April 2013

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

Driving around Bendigo and surroundings, as well as to Melbourne, is making me somewhat sad at present because so many trees, especially young ones from re-growth or re-vegetation efforts, have succumbed to the extreme conditions, presumably the long dry spell in combination with the long hot spell. This is natural selection in action, and there will be more of it in the near future. It is actually quite amazing too how many tees have survived, so let's hope the Easter Dragon will bring plenty of rain for them. This month we are starting with the 'Stories form Naree'. There are a few of these fascinating insights into life on a inland station, so I hope you'll like this first instalment and then want to read more.

Front page photographer: Joy Clusker

This collection of bones and skulls (including one of a northern territory crocodile) was photographed at John Wolseley's studio during the Family Nature Club excursion on March 17. How did all the skulls come to be there? When you visit a collector, you never know what you will find! See more pictures on page 6.

Short Notices

For all lovers of fungi…

Fungi play an integral role in ecosystems, yet little is known about them. Fungimap is a national non-profit organisation committed to the conservation of Australia's macrofungi. **Our seventh biennial conference is being held in Rawson, Victoria, in May 24-27.** Fungimap 7 is suitable for people with all levels of knowledge about fungi – from the absolute beginner to the mycologist.

For more information and to register for the conference (registration opens Feb 4), please see the Fungimap website at www.rbg.vic.gov.au/fungimap or contact Blanche Higgins Fungimap Coordinator, Mondays and Tuesdays 03 92522374, e-mail: blanche.higgins@rbg.vic.gov.au

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Bird Care Workshop presented by Dr Anne Fowler

When: 6th April. 8.30am registry for 9am prompt start

Where: Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall, Old High St., Golden Square

Dr Fowler is a veterinarian who is heavily involved and deeply committed in providing quality training in the care of Australian Wildlife. Anne will ensure you leave having learnt much about the special requirements of wild native birds arriving for care and needing to be released back into the wild.

Cost for non-WRIN members is $20. Morning and afternoon tea will be provided.

From Diana Collier, the Club Librarian

There are books, periodicals and pamphlets on the various subjects Field nats are interested in - Birds, mammals, Insects, the environment ... in our Book room. Feel free to browse and borrow. Just be sure to enter borrowings with date borrowed, your name and tel. no/contact info.

According to the records, *Grasses of N.S.W.* was borrowed last October and is now overdue. Please check in case you borrowed it and return or re-new loan.

Burrowing Crayfish in Mandurang

At the March general meeting, Glenise Moors described an unusual mud-chimney that was found at their Mandurang property recently. Glenise sent pictures of the chimney (see page 4) to the Melbourne Museum and received this reply from Jo, a volunteer at the Discovery Centre there:

'This was most likely made by a burrowing crayfish, probably *Engaeus*. The Melbourne Museum has an information sheet on these that can be read at http://museumvictoria.com.au/discoverycentre/infosheets/land-crayfish---who-s-digging-in-my-lawn/ . There are about 20 species of crayfish. The Australian government site http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/burrowing-crayfish/index.html#21 states that these animals can make quite deep burrows that connect to streams or the water-table or rely on run-off. They produce chimneys of mud pellets that can be up to 40 cm high. You rarely see the crayfish. The article at the bottom of the information sheet should be available from the State Library Victoria, or your local Field Naturalist group. The Arthur Rylah Institute has been doing research on burrowing crayfish and they may be able to identify the species of your crayfish. We hope you find this information useful, and should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Discovery Centre again in the future.'

Blue Wrens at Tidal River

by Peter Ellis

The photo on page 4 was taken at Tidal River Wilson's Prom in December two or three years ago. This December just gone, I took more photos, not as good as that, but the wrens were noticeably a darker blue; that's an interesting observation. I wonder if the intensity of plumage colour can vary according to season. Friends and I camp at Tidal River each year in the week or so just leading up to Christmas and at the same camp site, so from that point of view, the pictures have been taken at the same period of time and location.... *any comments welcome*

Late Summer Images

These are the mud chimneys Glenise Moors photographed at (oh, sooo dry) Mandurang and sent to the Melbourne Museum, to find out that they were made by a freshwater crayfish! (see page 3). Glenise said that it added 3 more rows of mud balls while they were away between March 6-13. When it rained on 21st, the whole structure 'melted' then the next day it washed down the slope.

Blue Wren at Tidal River (photo by Peter Ellis). Could the colour of the bird be changing? see pg 3

More images from afar... text and photos from Rod Orr

Jan & I found this beautiful little fungus, *Cryptotrama aspratum*, in the rainforest at Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens. This specimen was only a bit more than 1 cm in diameter on a slender stem, which was 4 or 5 cm tall. It was quite damp in this forest and the light level was very low so I spent a few minutes taking my photos - plenty of time for the resident bullants to find me. I retreated in such a hurry after I had been stung on the little finger, that I left the lens cap behind and then had to go back to find it after I'd realised that it was missing.
This fungus is one of the Fungimap 'target species' - more details are provided in the Fungimap publication, *Fungi Down Under*. My specimen was wet from recent showers and had its 'hair' tufts slicked down rather than sticking up.

On our way North, travelling to the South coast of NSW at the end of February, we stopped at Mallacoota for a couple of nights and revisited some of our favourite spots in the forest and along the coastline. We didn't really expect that we would find anything much still flowering and were very surprised to find just a few specimens of this beautiful orchid, *Dipodium variegatum,* still in good condition.
Its common name is the Variegated Hyacinth Orchid - it's very different from the locally occurring Hyacinth Orchids, which are rather plain by comparison.

Plague Soldier beetle, *Chauliognathus lugubris*. See article on page 10. Image from csironewsblog.com

March Family Nature Club event – visit to John Wolseley's studio in the Whipstick.
Photos and text by Joy Clusker

John is a fantastic story teller, artist and collector and the children had a great day following clues to hidden objects which they then incorporated into a huge drawing at the end. A big thanks to Tamara for making the day happen.

Collections of all sorts are very appealing and inspiring for people of all ages

Advertisement…This looks interesting and there are some big names in ecology down as speakers And…it's free

5th BIODIVERSITY ACROSS THE BORDERS CONFERENCE

"ENHANCING ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION"

7th June 2013 at The University of Ballarat, Mt Helen Campus

You are invited to the fifth one-day Biodiversity Across the Borders Conference. With the theme "ENHANCING ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION", this conference aims to communicate new ecological research to natural resource managers, the research community and those with an interest in better environmental management. The conference is jointly hosted by the University of Ballarat, La Trobe University, Deakin University, Victoria University, Charles Sturt University, University of Melbourne, Parks Victoria and other research partners. For natural resource managers, it is an excellent opportunity to learn about new applied research outcomes and what they mean for you. For researchers it is a great way to communicate your work in a way that can make a real difference. This conference continues to build and strengthen collaborative networks so as to enhance both research and land management into the future.

The program will include several mini symposia on topics such as:

- Large-scale connectivity and biodiversity conservation.
- Enhancing resilience: restoration and ecosystem management.
- Role of private land and nature reserves in biodiversity conservation.

Keynote Speaker Prof. David Lindenmayer:

The keynote address will be delivered by Professor David Lindenmayer, Australian National University. David is one of Australia's most prolific and innovative researchers and science communicators. David has published numerous scientific articles on diverse topics including forest and woodland ecology, heathlands, wildlife and biodiversity conservation, as well as ecologically sustainable natural resource management. He has also published 18 books. David is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science and has received numerous awards, including the 2010 Eureka Prize for Environmental Research, the 2011 Serventy Medal from the RAOU. He was jointly awarded the 1999 Eureka Science Prize. Amongst his six Whitley Awards are Forest Phoenix (2011), exploring forest responses to fire, and the co-authored Practical Conservation Biology (2006).

Additional guest speakers will include:

Associate Professor Ian Lunt (Charles Sturt University). *Left*
Professor Mike Clarke (La Trobe University). *Right*

All attendees must register beforehand. There will be no registration fee for attending this conference. Morning tea, afternoon tea and lunch will be provided. If you are interested in sponsoring or attending please provide me with your contact details (email preferred). A full itinerary will be published in the coming months.

For more details contact: Dr. S. K. Florentine - Email. s.florentine@ballarat.edu.au - Ph. 03 5327 9231

University of Ballarat Learn to succeed · LA TROBE UNIVERSITY · Institute for Land, Water and Society Charles Sturt University · The University of Melbourne · CRN Self-Sustaining Regions Research & Innovation Initiative Collaborative Research Network · Victoria University A New School of Thought · Deakin University · Parks Victoria Healthy Parks Healthy People

BFNC April Excursion

Theme: Mammals of the box-ironbark forests
Date/Time: Saturday 13 April, 9.00 to 12.00
Locations: Rosalind Park and Number 7 Park (Kangaroo Flat)
Leader: Kerrie Norris
Meet: Saturday 9.00 at BFNC clubrooms
Driving: 2 km to Rosalind Park and 8 km from there to No. 7 Park
Walking: Short distances only

What to bring: Binoculars, morning tea

Summary: Introduction to some of the native mammals dependent on the high biodiversity of the box–ironbark woodlands.
At Rosalind Park: Grey-headed Flying Foxes whose high mobility enables access to a range of habitats with various nectar sources.
At No. 7 Park: mammals using hollows - Sugar Gliders, Brush-tailed Phascogales (Tuan), microbats.

Further details: At No. 7 Park, a long-arm, computerized camera will be used to ascertain occupation of nest boxes by mammals. We will consider the role of human intervention in their future survival. Taxidermy skins will be used to observe salient features of certain mammals. No. 7 Park functions as a significant drought refuge for animals, and was an historical location in Bendigo's European settlement. There are numerous relics of curious engineering feats in the attempt to provide a stable water supply to the growing gold mining town.

News from the Bowling Green

by Tom Burton
Editor's comment: Tom Burton, an avid field naturalist wherever he lives (ex Bendigo, now in Melbourne) has taken up bowling in a big way. Here are some of the adventures from the greens,,,

This morning on the bowling green lay the dead and dying bodies of hundreds or thousands of Plague Soldier Beetles (*Chauliognathus lugubris*). I suppose you know these little cuties, so called because of the tremendous numbers they build up, rather than any damage they cause -- they are pollen and nectar feeders. All through the bowls season, they flew about the greens at various clubs I played at around Melbourne in huge numbers, about 1cm body length, glossy black elytra and head, bright yellow-orange thorax and abdomen (see page 5). They fly about head height, and are very easy to catch, even by holding out a stick for them to land on. As you can tell, I am very fond of them, the more so because a few weeks back, I had a very close view of a mating on the bowling green.

Given that earlier I had watched summer brown butterflies mating on the same bowling green, it is clear that bowling greens are not the biological deserts you may imagine them to be. Ours accommodates a range of animals, like cockchafer beetles that damage the grass, and fly at night, attracting the Ring-tailed Possums; Magpie Larks that play dodge ball with the 1.5 kilo bowls; and Little Ravens that dig for the cockchafers, leaving nasty little holes. We also support a broad range of mosses and fungi, including one that puts up white toadstools a couple of centimetres in diameter, which adhere to and retard the progress of the bowls, which go flap, flap, flap as they accumulate white dots. Of course, the greenkeeper mows them down and rolls the green before matches.

As a lapsed ethologist -- one of my earliest papers, with Steve Morton, was on behaviour of the Tasmanian wallaby in captivity -- I just had to watch the mating behaviour of the Plague Soldier Beetles as closely as I could, on hands and knees, regretting that I did not think to bring a magnifying glass to the green as part of my bowls kit. They mated on the ground, female, I assume, below, with her four front feet on the ground, her hind pair feathering around the area where congress was occurring, while the male's front pair grasped the female's thorax, his hind pair was planted on the ground, and his middle pair fluttered near the female's hind legs. Without

a magnifying glass, it was impossible to see what the male's middle and the female's hind legs were actually touching as they quivered together around the joined tips of their abdomens. I did not think to time the interaction -- in any case they were well under way before I saw them. Eventually they flew off, still coupled.

I don't know what killed off the Plague Soldier Beetles this morning. Perhaps they were collateral damage in the war between greenkeeper and fungi, or perhaps the war against cockchafers, or perhaps their summer was over, a few days after the equinox, and it was their time to go.

Short stories form Naree Station (1)

By Diane Davies

Editor's comment: For four months from last November, Ron and Di Davies were contracted to manage Naree Station, a 14,400ha property 150km NW of Bourke, NSW, on the road to Hungerford (Qld). The station changed hands in late November 2012 and is now owned by Bush Heritage Australia. (If you require more information about this non government organisation it is on the internet.) The challenges were many as we moved into a very hot summer - no air conditioning or insulation in the house, temperatures over 40 degrees for weeks on end, reptiles a constant danger, and the threat of bushfires started by lightning strikes. As dams and watering points dried up in February it became evident that the property was supporting thousands of feral animals - pigs, goats, foxes and cats. Four pig traps were loaned to us from the Animal Health and Pest Authority and they became an effective means of eliminating some pigs. Permanent managers arrived on the 5th of March, and Ron and Diane left the property Thursday, 7th March, to arrive back in Bendigo late Friday. Diane submitted several stories from her time at Naree, and they will be reproduced in the Whirrakee over the course of this year.

50 degrees in the Shade – 12th & 13th January 2013

January maximum temperatures ranged from 40° to 47° at **Naree Station** until the weekend of 12/13th. The country was experiencing a heat wave from north to south and Naree was in the middle of it. Naree is 150 km north west of Bourke and we have found that the temperature here is 3° hotter than Bourke. So we knew we were in for a hot weekend with Bourke forecast in the high 40s.

Friday's overnight temp was a cool 22° but quickly climbed to 38° by 9am, 44° by 10am and at midday it was 49°. By 2.30pm it peaked at 50°, remaining there for over an hour. (Our maximum/minimum thermometer is located in the shade under the back veranda.) By 8pm that evening the temperature had dropped back to 41°.

Saturday

In the morning I place a hose with sprinkler in the canopy of a *Callistemon* in the back yard and fill a large plastic pot plant saucer full of tank water beneath the shrub. Birds come and go all day – having a shower or finding a cool space to sit. Species include Spotted Bowerbird, Pied Butcherbird, Noisy Friarbird, Grey Shrike-thrush, Plum-headed Finch, Masked Woodswallow, Red-winged Parrot, Mudlark, Mistletoebird, Willie Wagtail, Magpie, Restless Flycatcher, Brown Treecreeper, White-winged Triller, Yellow-throated Miner, Brown Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Singing Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater and Sacred Kingfisher.

A Gould's Sand Goanna has been lurking about the garden all day and decides to cool off in the dish, its long tail unable to fit in. The goanna sits there for half an hour - all birds scampering, but quickly returning on the reptile's departure.

A White-winged Triller just sits on the lawn in some shade for ages, with wings slightly out and beak open, not moving an inch. The Red-winged Parrot has a beautiful peachy-red beak. It shares a cool branch with the Sacred Kingfisher at one stage. Another time it sits at the water dish sharing a cool drink with the honeyeaters. All bird beaks are wide open for

maximum cooling. Most species are happy to share the space but not when the Butcherbird comes in. I wonder why!

In the extreme heat of the afternoon the birds tend not to move much, either perching in the cool canopy or sitting on the thin-rimmed edge of the water dish or just standing nearby sharing a cool microclimate. Woodswallows are squatting on the damp ground beneath the shrub where water droplets have cooled the earth. Later in the day a White-plumed Honeyeater is found dead on the lawn - no chance of revival.

In the front garden (early morning) I place the sprinkler in the *Myoporum* and soon twelve Mistletoebirds are counted taking up position, cooling off in the spray. They sit there for ages, going into a trance-like state with eyes closed and heads pointed vertically upwards. They stay there for over an hour. Unfortunately some, probably this year's young, are unable to cope with the heat and four drop from their branches late in the afternoon. I attempt to assist them, picking them up and ridding them of tiny ants that quickly cover their whole body. The young female recovers with a few drops of water fed to her. I sit her on top of the fence where she perches for a while, then fluffs up and flies off. Three others do not respond, unfortunately. A Yellow-throated Miner also falls to the ground and is engulfed by ants. I feel helpless, unable to attend to all my patients. Millions of ants – no, billions of ants - cover every space on the ground and all through the lawn. Ant holes and highways are everywhere! It makes life difficult when one is bird-watching. Stopping for one second means ants climbing onto shoes, inside trousers and up one's legs.
Around 5pm two microbats have appeared and seen acting in a disoriented manner. One has flown into the chicken wire of the front fence near the Tamarisk. It manages to free itself quickly and fly off before I can get my camera. Another is found attempting to cling to the rainwater tank – but not for long. It flew off to an unknown fate. A dead Ringneck Parrot is found later in the day on the track near the lagoon.

Sunday
Early morning and the temperature has dropped to an overnight low of 27° giving some relief. As the day progresses it quickly heats up like the day before – 43° by 10am – another day of survival in extreme heat. Sprinklers are set up again in shrubs and water in the dish is replenished. These cool spaces are occupied all day, just as they were the day before.
In the front garden I fling the sprinkler over the fence and into the canopy of the Tamarisk, wetting foliage and giving cool relief to many birds soon seen visiting. Honeyeaters find a cool space under a thick wet branch. They sit there for ages with beaks open, just watching. I take some photos, my subjects allowing me to get closer than they would normally. It is too hot to move unless the threat is too great. Mistletoebirds come in, much to my relief. I am happy knowing some have survived. Two different species of wasp also find relief in the wet branches. By 4pm the temperature reaches its peak at 50°.
Overnight the sprinkler was left on to fill a large shallow puddle just beyond the front yard fence and in the shade of a Bimble Box. A Brown Goshawk sits in the puddle. It sits there for much of the day with all its friends! It's large yellow eye watch me intently as I move close for a photo. It allows me to get a few shots. Late in the afternoon the Goshawk flies into the Tamarisk just perching on a branch and remaining there for sometime. A few easy meals could be taken, but it remains still. It is just too hot to exert itself.

I venture outside on a number of occasions to check out sprinklers and water dishes and what birds are there. Any length of time outside means the body sweats profusely in order to cool itself and maintain core body temperature. By late afternoon clouds appear in the sky, coming in from the north. A cloud has covered the sun, creating shade and dropping the ambient temperature noticeably. As evening approaches the temperature begins to cool and by 8pm it is 42°. Sunset provides relief from a searing heat that hits you in the face during the day. A cool change is forecast – great news.

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday April 10 **7.30pm**
Dr. Andrea Kodym, Research Fellow, The University of Melbourne will talk about 'Propagating native plants for revegetation using plant tissue culture'

Excursions

April 13 Mammals of the Box-Ironbark Forest. Leader: Kerrie Norris. Destination: Rosalind Park and No. 7 Reservoir. See page 8 for details.

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Family Nature Club
"Walking Country " with Bambi Lees Sunday April 21st (in the Campaspe/Goornong area)
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
On the 16/04/13 the speaker will be Eric Wilkinson "Using Bonsai techniques for better container plants" followed by a group discussion on "Correas, the Goldilocks Plants"

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Bird Care workshop, 6th April, see Page 3.

Mapping great change: The landscape of Victoria – 22nd March – 16 June
Post Office Gallery, 51-67 Pall Mall, Bendigo

2013 Connecting Country Education Program. Connecting Country's 2013 Education Program has the theme 'learning from experience & learning from each other'. It is a diverse and interesting program and that is enjoyable, inspiring and, of course, educational. Check it out at:
http://connectingcountry.org.au/12/the-connecting-country-education-program-is-on-again/

Newstead Landcare, supported by *Connecting Country,* is playing host to a couple of terrific events next month. One of Australia's best known bird photographers, **Chris Tzaros,** will be visiting to talk about the art, craft ... and science of bird photography. Two separate events are planned.
1. Thursday 25th April, 8pm at the Newstead Community Centre - Chris will deliver a talk entitled **Bird Photography: Tips & Techniques.** As well as providing some practical information on the topic, the presentation will showcase some of Chris' breathtaking images. Gold coin donation to the Newstead Landcare Group.
2. Saturday 27th April (7.30am - 11.00am) - Chris and I will lead a **field workshop** in the local area. Participants will learn techniques for improving their photographic skills when capturing birds in their natural setting.
This workshop will cost $100 and is limited to 10 participants ... first in best dressed!
Please email geoff.park@nccma.vic.gov.au to register.